

"Love, The Most Excellent Way," Part 3 - 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 – January 17th, 2016

- Today's teaching is part three of a series I've titled, "Love, The Most Excellent Way."
- The text that we have before us this morning has been the source of much debate and sadly, division, within the body of Christ.
- It's for this reason that before we dive into verses 8-10, it's of paramount importance that we first, understand the context of it.
- The Apostle Paul is correcting, and even rebuking, the Corinthian Christians for the overemphasis of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- As such, this correction is actually a redirection of their focus from that of the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the fruit of the Holy Spirit.
- Namely, that of love, such that, love is not only the more excellent way to use the gifts, love is also the only way to use the gifts.
- This explains why Paul says we can speak in the tongues of angels or of men, but if we don't have love it's an obnoxious noise.
- It also explains why absent love, I am nothing, even if I have the gift of prophecy, have mountain moving faith, or all knowledge.
- And, it also explains why without love, I gain nothing, even if I give all I possess to the poor, and subject my body to hardship.
- Simply put, I can have all the gifts of the Holy Spirit but if I don't have love, I am nothing, I have nothing, and I will gain nothing.
- Such was the case with the Christians in the church of Corinth, they had the gifts, they used the gifts but they did not have love.
- The problem wasn't concerning the gifts of the Holy Spirit; rather, the problem was with the fruit of the Holy Spirit, which is, love.
- It's important to understand Paul is not throwing the proverbial baby of the gifts, out with the bathwater of the fruit of the Spirit.
- Actually, this is exactly what some have done vis-a-vis their misinterpretation of this very passage here in First Corinthians 13.
- More specifically, the misinterpretation of First Corinthians 13:8-10 has led to the false teaching known today as Cessationism.
- Cessationism is the false doctrine that the gifts of the Holy Spirit, specifically that of tongues, ceased with the twelve apostles.
- While I am keenly aware that I run the risk of an oversimplification, the very passage they use is the same one that refutes this.
- Here's how I get there, there is no specificity as to when they will cease, only that there will be a day yet future that they cease.
- The fact of the matter is that day yet future when they do cease is that great and final day when there will be no need for them.
- Conversely, there will be a need for love, which is the only thing that lasts for all eternity, whereas the gifts are for the temporal.
- Enter today's text, now within this aforementioned context of love's permanence eternally over the gifts, not in lieu of the gifts.

3. The gifts are not eternal only love is (Verses 8-10)

8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.

- v8 Paul says love never fails, but prophecies will one day cease, tongues will be stilled, and knowledge will one day pass away.
- v9-10 He says we know in part and prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what was in part will one day disappear.
- Notice how that in verse ten, the gifts cease only when completeness, or perfection, as some translations render it, has come.

- Unless and until said perfection has come, the gifts have not ceased and to suggest they have misses the point of the passage.
- Again, the importance of the context of the text cannot be overstated in the sense that it's chiefly about love and not the gifts.
- To make this about the gifts supremely, is to err greatly, so much so, modern day cessationists are as guilty as the Corinthians.
- This is a textbook case of one needing a paradigm shift from the over emphasis of the gifts of the Spirit to the fruit of the Spirit.
- By way of an illustration, which I think would be most helpful at this juncture; I'll liken it to the electricity that supplies a light bulb.
- The electricity is love, which supplies the light to the bulb and the bulb will expire when the source of the love is light for eternity.

I like how one commentator said it, "Prophecy, tongues, words of knowledge will one day all vanish. Why? In heaven there will be no need for prophecy—words of edification, exhortation, or comfort—because everyone will be perfectly comforted and edified in heaven and will no longer need to be exhorted. Unknown tongues will vanish because everything will be known in heaven. And words of knowledge will be swallowed up in the perfect knowledge we'll have when we see Jesus."

Another commentator echoed this writing, "Paul addresses the over-emphasis the Corinthian Christians had on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. He shows they should emphasize love more than the gifts, because the gifts are temporary "containers" of God's work; love is the work itself. Therefore, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are appropriate for the present time, but they are not permanent. They are imperfect gifts for an imperfect time."

- Still, the cessationists argue that the meaning of when perfection comes, is speaking of the canonization of the New Testament.
- However, the problem with this goes right back to the importance of context, which is the fruit of love, and not the word of God.
- This is evidenced by the conspicuous absence from the text of any mention of God's Word. Instead it's all about God's Love.
- Simply put, the perfection that will yet future come, is speaking of the Jesus Christ, Who is the only personification of perfection.
- Truth be known, this is the only interpretation that makes any sense whatsoever, as the imperfect gifts are no longer needed.
- Perhaps better said, when we are with the Lord, there will be no need for that which we desperately needed prior to His return.
- You'll forgive the apologetic bent of today's teaching as it relates to cessationism, however, here-in lies our takeaway for today.
- Dare I say, that both love and the gifts are sorely needed for today, because there's coming a day, when only love will remain.
- Just as we live our lives in light of eternity so too should the emphasis and priority of our lives be love, which lasts for eternity.